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REPORT ON KHRUSHCHEV VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 15-27, 1959

Khrushchev's Treatment of the Issues of Berlin and Germany



In his public statements and in the discussions he had with various groups during his tour, Khrushchev did not make significant innovations in the Soviet position on Germany and Berlin. Indeed, these subjects did not figure very prominently in what he had to say. His chief purpose seemed to be to give an exposition in broad terms of the Soviet position while holding back possible modifications for subsequent negotiations.

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The burden of what Khrushchev had to say while in the US was set forth in his Foreign Affairs article, published September 3, twelve days before he arrived in the US. He reiterated the view that a peace treaty should be concluded with the two German states, arguing that after 14 years an end should finally be put to the "aftermath of World War II," especially since the absence of a "peaceful settlement" had "afforded wide scope for the renewed activities of the West German militarists and revanchists." He further reiterated the Soviet line that it had become "unrealistic" to speak of German unification prior to a peace treaty and that, in any event, this matter should not be subject to "outside interference."

As regards Berlin, Khrushchev denied any Soviet intentions of seizing or infringing upon the rights of the population of West Berlin and reiterated, without significant elaboration, the Soviet proposal for establishing a "free city" in West Berlin. In his speech to the National Press Club, Khrushchev added a general statement to the effect that the independence of West Berlin should be ensured by the "most reliable guarantees known in international relations with or without the participation of the United Nations."

As noted, these delineations of the Soviet position were not materially embellished by Khrushchev in his subsequent statements. Khrushchev did suggest to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the USSR might be prepared to withdraw its forces from East Germany if the West withdrew its forces from the Federal Republic, a proposition occasionally advanced in informal Soviet statements before and embodied in the Soviet draft for a German peace treaty of January 19, 1959.

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In a private conversation with Ambassador Lodge, Khrushchev asserted that there were no Soviet missile bases of nuclear weapons in East Germany, again points that he had made previously.

Subsequent to the Camp David talks, at his National Press Club press conference, Khrushchev refused to be drawn out on the line he had taken with the President regarding Germany and Berlin. He did assert that the two had "found much in common." He further stated that he saw "no other way" than to sign a peace treaty with the two German states, though he invited "other suggestions" which would equally further the bringing of peace to Germany.

In his speech at the Luzhniki Sports Palace on returning to Moscow, Khrushchev omitted all references to Berlin, but repeated Soviet advocacy of a peace treaty and denied that there was any ultimatum attached to it. On September 28, however, Khrushchev used the vehicle of a TASS interview to confirm the understanding reached at Camp David and announced by the President at his press conference on September 27 that negotiations on "the Berlin issue" should be resumed, that there should be no time limit to them, but that they should not be indefinitely protracted. Khrushchev added that the interested parties should strive toward a solution of the "problem of West Berlin" without delay.

The Soviet objective of a "free city" was reiterated in the October Revolution slogans issued by the CPSU Central Committee October 3, as was the need for a peace treaty. Both objectives were cited by First Deputy Chairman Koslov during his speeches in East Germany in connection with the GDR's tenth anniversary celebrations, as was the agreement regarding the resumption of negotiations. Khrushchev himself has not referred to Berlin or Germany in his speeches since his statements in Moscow on September 27-28.

It will be noted that although Khrushchev in the US several times averred that the Geneva Foreign Ministers' Conference had produced some good in that there had been frank exchanges and the two sides had brought their positions closer on a number of points, at no time in his public and semi-public statements in the US did he discuss a possible "interim" arrangement. That is, he in effect at all times stated the maximum Soviet position. He did, however, convey an impression of flexibility when he told Austrian President Schaerf on October 13 that "absorption by West Germany" was the only solution of the West Berlin problem acceptable to the USSR and that any other solution could be worked out.

In sum, the substantive Soviet position respecting Berlin and

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Germany (and Gromyko at one point remarked that for the USSR the question of Germany means the question of a peace treaty), did not undergo any change as a result of what Khrushchev said in the US, and subsequently, except that he is now clearly on record as agreeing that future negotiations should not be conducted under a time limit. At the same time, the other part of the understanding -- that negotiations should not be protracted indefinitely -- is clearly subject to varying interpretations. It remains to be seen whether and when the USSR will be disposed to invoke it in the event negotiations should be deadlocked. It thus appears that the threat of unilateral Soviet action respecting Berlin has been removed as long as negotiations are impending or under way. But on the face of it, the USSR remains uncommitted about extending a moratorium on unilateral action indefinitely, and particularly beyond the point at which talks might deadlock or rupture. In the negotiations themselves, the USSR remains committed to seek an "end to the occupation status" and to the "abnormal" situation in West Berlin. This commitment appears to be unaffected by any of the statements that Khrushchev made while in the US.

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